

# **EXHIBIT 115**

## REBUTTAL EXPERT REPORT OF DR. SOPHIA MOSKALENKO

June 20, 2023

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Dear Mr. Biss:

I have reviewed the expert witness reports compiled by Mr. Rothschild and Dr. Giddens. I disagree with Mr. Rothchild's opinion that the evidence in the case supports the claim that Jack and Leslie Flynn were/are QAnon followers. Below I summarize my response and rebuttal of Mr. Rothschild's report, addressing the most important, though not all, issues with the report's conclusions and the factual and logical foundations on which it rests.

### 1. Credibility

#### a. Reporting facts

Mr. Rothschild's report contains a number of factual inaccuracies, starting with the first page of the report, where Mr. Rothschild claims that his book on QAnon "was the first book to examine the QAnon movement from its predecessor scams and anti-Semitic tropes." This statement is false, as Mr. Rothschild's book came out after my book on QAnon, co-authored with Dr. Bloom. [see attached Appendix 1: Google data on release dates for each book]. Mr. Rothschild was aware of our book's publication date, as is evidenced by his direct message exchanges on Twitter with my co-author, Dr. Bloom. [see attached Appendix B]. Likewise, in his resume [Ex. B to his report], Mr. Rothschild says in the opening paragraph that he has "an extensive history of published work, including three books." However, Mr. Rothschild has only published two books. The third book he lists as published is only scheduled to come out in September. Here, too, Mr. Rothschild has misrepresented facts he had direct and full knowledge of.

The inaccuracies in Mr. Rothschild's expert report do not end with self-presentation. Instead, they continue with his presentation of the case-specific facts, and he goes on to base his expert opinion on these inaccuracies. Thus, for example, Mr. Rothschild states on p. 3 of his report that he bases his opinion in part on "Leslie Flynn's familiarity with 'Where We Go One, We Go All' and her willingness to appear in the July Fourth Video." Mr. Rothschild fails to cite evidence for this claim. However, in her sworn deposition, Leslie Flynn states numerous times that she had NO FAMILIARITY with the phrase, and that taking the oath she was making a statement about family unity rather than anything to do with QAnon. [See Leslie Flynn Deposition Transcript ("Dep. Tr."), pp. 33, 20-24: "Q. In the video, obviously, you-all say the 'Where we go one, we go all,' correct? A. Yes. Q. And when was the first time you heard that? A. That day; see also pp. 34 22-23: "Q. So the first time you saw 'WWG1WGA' was after the Fourth of July? A. Yes."].

Similarly, on p. 16 of his report, Mr. Rothschild states that the second take of the video was “to make sure [the video] was perfect for a viral video.” There is no supporting evidence in Mr. Rothschild’s report. In fact, evidence in the case contradicts this statement. Wilson Powell, who recorded the video, testified that the second take was for a completely different reason than the one Mr. Rothschild espouses in his report: “Q. So why was there a second take? What happened after the first take that required a second take? WILSON POWELL: I think somebody thought they could state the Constitution a little bit better.” [See Wilson Powell Dep. Tr., pp. 52:22-24, 53:1-3). Mr. Rothschild once again misstated the facts in his report.

On p. 20 of his report, Mr. Rothschild states, “Jack and Leslie Flynn promoted the Legal Defense Fund using ‘Digital Soldiers’ and WWGIWGA when possible”. Mr. Rothschild fails to provide supporting evidence for this claim. In fact, in her deposition, Leslie Flynn testified that she was NOT involved with the Legal Defense Fund at all, and neither was her husband. [See Leslie Flynn Dep. Tr., p. 242:14-21: “Q. Are you aware where the money raised from the Flynn Legal Defense Fund ended up? A. No. I was not involved in that at all. Q. Who was involved in it? A. I don’t know. Q. Okay. Was your husband involved? A. No.”].

On p. 25 of his report, MR writes that “over the course of 2019 and 2020, Jack consistently ... boosted conspiracy theories embraced by QAnon”, providing the following citation for this claim: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200701034959/twitter.com/gojackflynn>. The link opens an archive of Jack Flynn’s Twitter account. Having read through it, as well as through the materials supplied to me by Mr. Biss, I do not see any evidence of Jack Flynn’s stating his own belief or expressing his support for others’ beliefs in any QAnon conspiracy theory. Mr. Rothschild’s statement is thus unsupported by facts.

Also on p. 25, Mr. Rothschild states that Jack Flynn was “a serious voice in the Q community.” There is no evidence provided in the report to support this claim, and there is none in the Giddens report. It is therefore a baseless statement.

In short, there are numerous inaccuracies in Mr. Rothschild’s report, many of which are then used as arguments to support his opinion that Jack and Leslie Flynn were QAnon followers.

#### **b. Conflict of interest**

In addition to misreporting facts, relevant to the report’s credibility is a potential conflict of interest. Mr. Rothschild is a journalist who primarily focuses his reporting on QAnon—as stated in his resume, he has “built a leading brand as expert in the QAnon conspiracy theory.” His livelihood, therefore, depends entirely on his stories about QAnon being in demand by news outlets. As such, Mr. Rothschild’s financial and professional interests align with QAnon being perceived by the broader public as large (and violent). When faced with choices about whom to count as QAnon followers, Mr. Rothschild might therefore be inclined to count “false positives” as QAnon followers, thus perpetuating the perceived relevance of QAnon and boosting his self-interest as a journalist relying on selling stories of QAnon to the media.

**c. Bias**

A significant portion of Mr. Rothschild's report talks about words or actions of General Flynn and Sidney Powell (see, for example, pp. 11, 13, 14 and 15 of Mr. Rothschild's report). From the frequency with which they are featured in Mr. Rothschild's report one might think that what these two individuals did or said with respect to QAnon or the phrase 'Where We Go One We Go All' was directly related to what Jack and Leslie Flynn believed. Mr. Rothschild's writing goes so far as to conflate the identities and agency of General Flynn and those of Jack and Leslie Flynn and Valerie and Lori Flynn when he refers to them collectively as "Flynn Family" (see, e.g., pp. 13, 19, 21 of MR report). However, Mr. Rothschild supplies no evidence that General Flynn or Sidney Powell ever spoke or acted on behalf of Jack and/or Leslie Flynn, or shared his views on QAnon with them, or instructed Jack and Leslie Flynn on the meaning of the phrase 'where we go one, we go all' or on what to believe. In fact, Leslie Flynn states in her deposition that the July 4<sup>th</sup> barbecue was the very first time she ever met Sidney Powell. [see Leslie Flynn Dep. Tr., p. 32:13-18: "Q. Okay. Did you know Sidney or Wilson Powell before this day? A. No. Q. This was the first time you met Sidney Powell? A. Yes."].

In the absence of any evidence to suggest Sidney Powell represented Jack or Leslie Flynn's opinions or spoke on their behalf, and in the absence of evidence that General Flynn's words or actions had a causal relationship with Jack or Leslie Flynn's beliefs, what possible reason is there to use words or actions General Flynn or Sidney Powell as evidence for the Plaintiffs' thoughts, intentions and beliefs? There is none. Because both General Flynn and Sidney Powell are public figures who were featured often in political coverage surrounding Donald Trump and the events of January 6, 2021<sup>1, 2</sup>, with many holding strong opinions about them, Mr. Rothschild's report, intentionally or not, makes a case of "guilt by association."

In fact, for the purpose of determining whether Jack and Leslie Flynn are (or were) QAnon followers, it should not matter what Sidney Powell said to the press about the phrase 'where we go one, we go all', nor whether General Flynn attended a "QAnon event"—it should only matter what Jack and Leslie Flynn said, and what they did.

Journalists have been shown to engage in biased reporting, particularly about new religious movements.<sup>3,4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/10/flynn-jan-6-select-committee-pleads-the-fifth-00016401>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/article263479988.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Richardson, J. T., & Van Driel, B. (1997). Journalists' attitudes toward new religious movements. *Review of Religious Research*, 116-136.

<sup>4</sup> DYERS, K., HAMILTON, J., KENJA, W. I., MEDITATION, E. C., KLOWNING, K., WORK, O., ... & DYERS, T. B. K. (1996). JOURNALISTIC BIAS AGAINST NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN AUSTRALIA. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 11(3).

Many researchers agree that QAnon is a new religious movement,<sup>5,6</sup> which makes QAnon susceptible to the same reporting biases that have been shown to characterize journalistic coverage of new religious movements. Mr. Rothschild's book about QAnon calls it a cult (which is a term sometimes used pejoratively to stand in for "new religious movement"<sup>7</sup>). Mr. Rothschild's opinion needs to be considered in this light.

## 2. A catchy phrase with a bad association

Mr. Rothschild's report states that the phrase "where we go one, we go all" is "almost exclusively used by believers in QAnon". [Report, p.1]. "The phrase 'Where We Go One, We Go All' has virtually no other recent popular usage than in the QAnon movement." "It is a key catchphrase in the QAnon movement, and is popularly used only by the QAnon movement." [p. 2]. Mr. Rothschild offers no evidence to support these claims about the use of the phrase.

The expert witness report by Dr. Giddens examines the appearance of the phrase on social media, and makes a case that the phrase was indeed used heavily in connection with QAnon content. [Giddens, p. 11, Figure 7]. However, the Giddens report does NOT support Mr. Rothschild's claim that the phrase does not appear outside of QAnon usage. There is no data in the Giddens report that analyzes non-QAnon social media for incidents of the phrase's use—or lack thereof.

At the same time, the Giddens report analyzes responses to the July 4, 2020 backyard barbecue video, where members of the Flynn family use the phrase "where we go one, we go all" for evidence of QAnon-related content in those responses. Importantly, the Giddens report establishes that the majority of replies (69%) included **NO QAnon references**. [Giddens Report, p. 29 ("The following breakdown shows those replies that associated the Flynn Family Video with QAnon: No QAnon Reference: 2749/3983 69% QAnon Reference: 1234/3983 31%")]. These data show that the phrase "where we go one, we go all" can be, and often is, viewed outside of QAnon context—contrary to Mr. Rothschild's repeated assertions.

Mr. Rothschild also bases his opinion that Jack and Leslie Flynn were QAnon followers on "the timing of the 'oath' taken by the Flynn family, and how it quickly followed a Q drop on the image board 8kun that used the exact same phraseology – and how it was quickly adopted by both the QAnon movement in general and General Flynn in particular." [MR Report, p. 3].

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<sup>5</sup> Argentino, M. A. (2022). Qvangelicalism: QAnon as a Hyper-Real Religion. In *Religious Dimensions of Conspiracy Theories* (pp. 257-279). Routledge.

<sup>6</sup> Juergensmeyer, M. (2022). QAnon as Religious Terrorism. *Journal of Religion and Violence*, 10(1), 89-100.

<sup>7</sup> See [https://lib.hoover.mcdaniel.edu/c.php?g=42761&p=270600#:~:text=%22New%20Religio us%20Movement%20\(NRM\),a%20number%20of%20shared%20traits.](https://lib.hoover.mcdaniel.edu/c.php?g=42761&p=270600#:~:text=%22New%20Religio us%20Movement%20(NRM),a%20number%20of%20shared%20traits.)

However, a catchy phrase has a greater likelihood of being repeated when it's most prolifically spreading, regardless of the intentions of those who started the trend or other people who picked it up.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the fact that the phrase was on the rise in popular usage when the Flynns also used it does not help determine the Flynns' intentions or their understanding of the phrase's origins or their knowledge of its association with QAnon.

It might be helpful to consider another case of a popular phrase with long roots, an association with a nefarious political movement, and an occasional controversy when used by those unaware of this association. The phrase is "To each its own."

If we surveyed 100 Americans on the street about their perceptions of this phrase, most would say they like it. If we came to family barbecues and invited our loved ones to repeat this phrase under some appropriate circumstances, most would likely agree to repeat "to each its own" on camera. A case could then be made against them as promoting Nazi propaganda, and thus being followers of Nazism. Because, despite the phrase's origins long preceding the Third Reich (it originated with Plato and Ancient Roman laws where it meant that justice is served as long as everyone minds their own business),<sup>9</sup> the Third Reich resurrected the phrase, appropriated and popularized it as a motto to justify atrocities against Jews and other minorities.

The German translation of the phrase, "Jedem das seine" was placed over the gates of Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, Germany.<sup>10</sup> The lettering faced the inside of the camp rather than facing outward as did the infamous phrase "Arbeit macht frei" over the gates to Auschwitz. In this positioning, "to each its own" was meant to spell to the doomed victims of Nazi genocide that their suffering was pre-destined, or that the people inside the concentration camp got exactly what they deserved.<sup>11</sup> As chilling as this association between the phrase and Nazism is, not everyone is aware of it even in Germany, with the consequence that major public groups and companies occasionally use the phrase for its catchiness and popular appeal without realizing its dark history—and then run into controversy. These controversies have marred such major companies as Exxon Mobile, Nokia, and Burger King, among others, who used the phrase in their commercials; even a student group, Cristian Democratic Union, has unwittingly used the phrase in its education campaign.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bikhchandani, S., Hirshleifer, D., & Welch, I. (1992). A theory of fads, fashion, custom, and cultural change as informational cascades. *Journal of political Economy*, 100(5), 992-1026.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/german-proverb-changed-through-history-4025700>.

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jedem\\_das\\_Seine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jedem_das_Seine).

<sup>11</sup> <https://forhistiur.net/en/2005-05-van-den-bergh/?l=de>.

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Jedem\\_das\\_Seine](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Jedem_das_Seine).

To summarize, catchy phrases can be co-opted by political movements, including nefarious ones, while still retaining their original appeal and their intrinsic meaning, which makes it possible for individuals and groups to use these phrases without knowing the associations. Nazism is a much longer-standing and far more deadly political movement than QAnon, with many more people aware of its symbols than there are people aware of QAnon's symbolism (a 2020 Pew poll found that 76% of Americans have heard or read "nothing at all" about QAnon<sup>13</sup>). And yet in Germany, where history of Nazism is highly salient and familiar to all, a number of high-profile groups and organizations nonetheless took up a Nazi-favored phrase as an advertising slogan because they did not realize the association. That the same fate might befall a relatively new phrase of a relatively new and a relatively fringe movement should not be surprising.

### 3. Accepting money along with symbology

Mr. Rothschild cites as one of the bases of his opinion "General Flynn and his family's involvement with and monetization of the QAnon movement." He states, on p. 7 of his report, "In fact, in their own depositions in this case, members of the Flynn family make it clear that they would accept donations to General Flynn's Legal Defense Fund from 'anybody that was supportive of [General Flynn], whether they were QAnon people or not.'"

Mr. Rothschild's inference that accepting money associated with QAnon symbology means Jack Flynn supports QAnon is strange to say the least. Consider for example the \$1 bill. Although not many people might not be aware of this fact, the one dollar bill depicts symbols associated with a secret society of Free Masons<sup>14, 15</sup>, including the "all-seeing eye"<sup>16</sup>.

If Mr. Rothschild's reasoning is to be followed, anyone who ever accepted a one dollar bill in payment (and in doing so also accepted the Masonic symbols on it), should be viewed as a Free Mason. In Mr. Rothschild's reasoning, if one were not a Free Mason, one should reject one dollar bills when offered, or object to the person giving the money about the symbols on them as incongruous with one's beliefs, or perhaps cut out the masonic symbols from one dollar bills before handing them out—to avoid spreading the ideology of Free Masons by spreading symbology associated with them. According to Mr. Rothschild, anyone who failed to do any of the above actions to disassociate their handling of one dollar bills from Masonic symbols qualifies as a follower of Free Masons' beliefs. In other words, almost every person in the United States and many more around the world are followers of the Free Masons, according to this reasoning. This is both statistically and logically impossible, because Mr. Rothschild's reasoning for what defines a QAnon follower is faulty.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/03/30/qanons-conspiracy-theories-have-seeped-into-u-s-politics-but-most-dont-know-what-it-is/>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://freemason.org/freemasonry-symbols/>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://daily.jstor.org/the-strange-history-of-masons-in-america/>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://gwmemorial.org/blogs/news/the-eye-of-providence>.



Indeed people routinely accept money along with symbology they may not even know is there, or know what it stands for, or know what belief system it might be associated with, or subscribe to those beliefs. The actions of a person when accepting money with QAnon symbology should not be any more diagnostic of their belief system than actions of people who accept one dollar bills with Masonic symbology.

#### **4. Circular reasoning**

Mr. Rothschild's report offers opinion on whether CNN's reporting that Jack and Leslie Flynn were QAnon followers was accurate. However, that opinion is often based on circular reasoning.

For example, on p. 3 of his report, Mr. Rothschild states as one of the reasons for his opinion, "Many Q followers simultaneously use Q catchphrases and iconography while also denying they know anything about Q or actively claiming Q is fake." This statement, however, contains an assertion that the people who share QAnon catchphrases and iconography ARE QAnon followers—which is the question in dispute about Jack and Leslie Flynn.

Similarly, on p. 9, Mr. Rothschild's report states another reason for his opinion of the Flynns, "Using a Q term or meme in public shows others that you approve of QAnon, and you want people to know that. That is exactly what Jack and Leslie Flynn did with their video using the phrase 'Where We Go One, We Go All' In the Fourth of July Video." This statement presumes the Flynns had knowledge that what they were saying in the video was a QAnon term or meme--which is in dispute in this case. Jack and Leslie Flynn deny having this knowledge in their sworn depositions, and there is no evidentiary support for them having this knowledge in any of the materials I reviewed for the case, including Jack and Leslie Flynn's social media activity.

On p. 17 of his report, Mr. Rothschild writes, "Even in the reporting on the lawsuits filed by Jack and Leslie Flynn against CNN, the phrase is explicitly referred to as a QAnon oath. All told, dozens of news outlets in the US and abroad have linked the Flynns with QAnon specifically because they joined in on the #TakeTheOath movement and used the QAnon slogan." Mr. Rothschild similarly states on p. 24, "And furthermore, immediately after the Flynns took the oath, and for months thereafter, the media consistently referred to them as taking the QAnon oath."

However, the actions of the media *AFTER* the barbecue cannot possibly speak to the Flynn's motives, beliefs or knowledge at the time of the barbecue. Far from being a justification for labeling the Flynns QAnon followers, these claims in Mr. Rothschild's report seem to help the Flynns' case, by pointing out the high likelihood of damage to one's public image when an outrageous, unverified and unsubstantiated claim is made repeatedly by the media.

#### **5. Validity of assessment of whether Jack and Leslie Flynn are QAnon followers**

On p. 3 of his report, Mr. Rothschild lists as his number one reason for concluding that Jack and Leslie Flynn were QAnon followers the following: "Standard journalistic practice of describing anyone who shares QAnon material or catchphrases as a follower or believer in the conspiracy movement – even if 'belief' is a concept that cannot be quantitatively measured."



**a. What is standard journalistic practice?**

On the issue of “standard journalistic practice,” Mr. Rothschild fails to supply a reference, and I was not able to locate any resource that would lay out what is or is not “standard journalistic practice.”

However, I did find official resources for journalistic ethical standards, such as the one by Society for Professional Journalists (SPJ)—“SPJ Code of Ethics.” In the Code of Ethics on its website, SPJ states that journalists must “take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it. Use original sources whenever possible.” This standard was not followed by CNN’s reporting, because CNN did not verify accuracy of the statement they put up on screen, and they did not use original sources (*i.e.*, Jack and Leslie Flynn) to verify the claim they were making in their report. In the same ethics guidelines, SPJ states that journalists must “diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing.” In its reporting, CNN failed to follow this standard of journalistic practice, as they did not reach out to Jack or Leslie for comment on a report that alleged the Flynns’ association with QAnon. Later still, SPJ Ethics Code states, “Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.” Without any contact with Jack or Leslie Flynn, and without an examination of their social media, CNN appears to have relied entirely on stereotyping when they labeled Jack and Leslie Flynn as QAnon followers.

In social psychology, stereotypes are defined as “a fixed, oversimplified, and often biased belief about a group of people.”<sup>17</sup> When using stereotypes, people tend to ignore personal information about individuals from stereotyped group and instead view them in simplified, over-generalized ways.<sup>18</sup> Thus, stereotyping seems consistent with the way CNN approached the Flynns when reporting about them—and in violation of ethical standards of journalistic practice as specified by the Society of Professional Journalists.

To sum up, as far as standard journalistic practices are related to ethical standards for professional journalists, they were not followed in this example of CNN reporting, and Mr. Rothschild’s assertion that “standard journalistic practices” justify CNN’s labeling Jack and Leslie Flynn as QAnon followers is false.

**6. Measuring beliefs**

The second issue with Mr. Rothschild’s statement is his assertion that “belief” is a concept that cannot be quantitatively measured.” This assertion is (a) false; and (b) it raises questions about Mr. Rothschild’s ability to offer a valid opinion in the matter at hand.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/stereotype-social>.

<sup>18</sup> Sabini, J. (1992). *Social Psychology*. First Edition. Norton, New York. (pp. 123-143).

**a. Can beliefs be measured?**

Beliefs are, in fact, routinely measured quantitatively by social scientists. For example, political scientists measure beliefs in climate change<sup>19</sup> or beliefs in the threat of COVID<sup>20</sup>; economists measure people's beliefs systems to see how these impact their choices about financial support for various initiatives<sup>21</sup>; religion scholars measure religious beliefs<sup>22</sup>; sociologists measure beliefs in social inequality<sup>23</sup>; and social psychologists measure, among other things, beliefs in conspiracy theories<sup>24</sup>, including beliefs in QAnon conspiracy theories<sup>25</sup>. In addition to social science researchers, polling companies also routinely measure beliefs, including beliefs in QAnon conspiracy theories.<sup>26</sup>

There are a number of well-validated ways to measure beliefs. Perhaps the most common way to measure beliefs is through a *public opinion poll* or a *survey*. This involves asking people a question about their beliefs, and offering them options to answer that correspond to a number on an ordinal scale, such that lower belief corresponds to lower numbers and higher belief corresponds to higher numbers. Many major polling companies have carried out large-scale polls measuring beliefs about QAnon. For example, PRRI has conducted a poll asking participants about their beliefs in QAnon among a random sample of 5,149 adults (age 18 and up) living in all 50 states in the United States and who are part of Ipsos's Knowledge Panel and an additional 476 who were recruited by Ipsos using opt-in survey panels to increase the sample sizes in smaller states<sup>27</sup> (see graphic below representing some of their findings).

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/nclimate2943>.

<sup>20</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2378023120972575>.

<sup>21</sup> <https://le.uwpress.org/content/82/4/602.short>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/10264116201000003/full/html>.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.jstor.org/stable/2095476?casa\\_token=lvZksYjJfJIAAAAAA%3A2F68\\_iZ7FkziXi8HvPJnPWjpjLmlX4jN3m4nmxu1oUhIOTgORc9EjT91c04SQkhvbxwvS0ywj2fwrQUO2tzjkWkEapohQVvAdqTPiJV64SZyg5bdJ5E](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2095476?casa_token=lvZksYjJfJIAAAAAA%3A2F68_iZ7FkziXi8HvPJnPWjpjLmlX4jN3m4nmxu1oUhIOTgORc9EjT91c04SQkhvbxwvS0ywj2fwrQUO2tzjkWkEapohQVvAdqTPiJV64SZyg5bdJ5E)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00205/full>.

<sup>25</sup> Enders, A. M., Uscinski, J. E., Klofstad, C. A., Wuchty, S., Seelig, M. I., Funchion, J. R., ... & Stoler, J. (2022). Who supports QAnon? A case study in political extremism. *The Journal of politics*, 84(3), 1844-1849.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.prri.org/press-release/new-prri-report-reveals-nearly-one-in-five-americans-and-one-in-four-republicans-still-believe-in-qanon-conspiracy-theories/>.

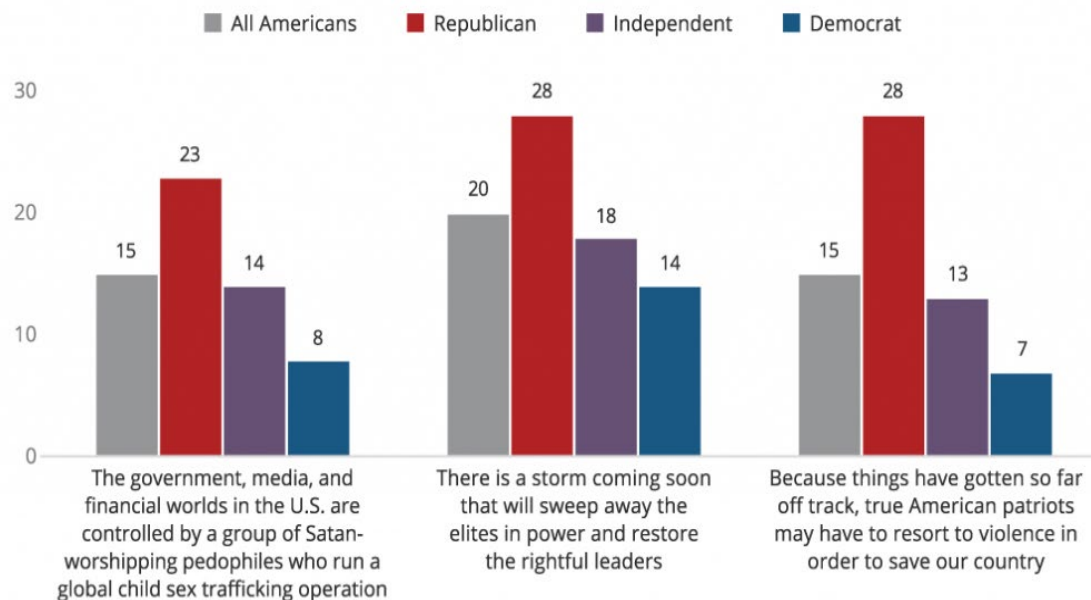
<sup>27</sup> <https://www.prri.org/research/qanon-conspiracy-american-politics-report/>.

In the PRRI poll, participants were asked to answer on a 4-point scale (Likert scale), whether they (1) strongly disagreed; (2) somewhat disagreed; (3) somewhat agreed; and (4) strongly agreed with the three kinds of conspiracy theories represented in the graph below and often called the core tenants of QAnon.

Participants who answered, on average, “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree” on all three questions were then considered “believers” by the poll researchers.

**FIGURE 1. QAnon Conspiracy Theories, by Party Affiliation**

Percent who agree:



Source: PRRI-IFYC March 2021 Survey.

Using different measures of QAnon support, CIVIQS polling agency asked over 100,000 participants “Do you support QAnon?”<sup>28</sup> with response options being (a) No; (b) I’ve never heard of QAnon; (c) Unsure; and (d) yes. Those who answered “yes” were then counted as QAnon supporters.

Researchers Joe Usinsky and Adam Enders, the leading scholars on psychology of conspiracy theories and QAnon, use yet another metric to assess support for QAnon. Respondents in their national, representative surveys report their views about the “QAnon movement” vis-à-vis a 101-point “feeling thermometer.” The thermometer ranges from 0, representing very negative feelings, to 100, which signifies very positive feelings.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup>

[https://civiqs.com/results/qanon\\_support?uncertainty=true&annotations=true&zoomIn=true](https://civiqs.com/results/qanon_support?uncertainty=true&annotations=true&zoomIn=true)

<sup>29</sup>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/aug/18/qanon-america-conspiracy-theory>

I have also carried out survey studies where I measured participants' beliefs in QAnon. Because QAnon is an “umbrella” conspiracy theory which assembles many and at times contradictory beliefs, and followers don't necessarily believe in the same subset of conspiracy theories, I have constructed a scale that would allow for this diversity, capturing those who believe in the “tenets” of child-kidnapping cabal featured in the PRRI poll referenced above, but also those who might believe in the more “fringe” conspiracy theories that have been linked with QAnon, such as Lizard people; Flat Earth, Space Lasers, etc. Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=Not at all to 5=very much.<sup>30</sup> To calculate a person's score on the scale of QAnon belief, I average their responses on the eight items. I consider “QAnon followers” those participants whose average score falls above 2.5 – the mid-point of the 5-point Likert scale.

In addition to survey measurements, there are other ways of quantitatively assessing beliefs in QAnon. This can be done, for example, through *structured or semi-structured interviews*<sup>31</sup> in which questions of beliefs are raised. The responses are then coded<sup>32</sup> for markers of beliefs, including particular words or phrases. Typically, a coding scheme is first developed with a list of words or phrases that theoretically might represent expression of beliefs. Then, two or more coders work independently on the same interviews, and their coding of the same material is compared to test their inter-rater reliability. Once a high level of agreement is achieved between independent coders, their (numerical) coding data are entered into a statistical package for quantitative analyses.

In a way, depositions are like semi-structured interviews in that individuals can be asked about their beliefs. These answers are quantifiable. For example, “do you believe X” is a direct question about beliefs. A “no” would be scored by coders as the lowest value on a numerical scale of belief, just as a “yes” would achieve the highest score on the same scale. More ambiguous statements would fall somewhere in between—with some training in research methods needed to determine where they might fall.

Additionally, individuals may spontaneously utter statements that indicate their beliefs.

For example, stating that a cabal of powerful Satan-worshipping pedophiles is kidnapping and torturing children for their adrenochrome-enriched blood would achieve a high numerical score on a coding scheme measuring beliefs in QAnon conspiracy theories. Similar considerations can be used when assessing individuals' writing, or tweeting.

Perhaps as a result of his opinion that beliefs can't be measured, and because he does not have training in social science or in research methods used for measuring beliefs, Mr. Rothschild often makes baseless attributions when assessing Jack Flynn's beliefs and knowledge of QAnon.

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<sup>30</sup> Moskalenko, S., Pavlović, T., & Burton, B. (under review). QAnon beliefs, political radicalization and support for January 6 th insurrection: A gendered perspective. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368714516\\_QAnon\\_beliefs\\_political\\_radicalization\\_and\\_support\\_for\\_January\\_6\\_th\\_insurrection\\_a\\_gendered\\_perspective](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368714516_QAnon_beliefs_political_radicalization_and_support_for_January_6_th_insurrection_a_gendered_perspective).

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.simplypsychology.org/interviews.html>.

<sup>32</sup> <https://delvetool.com/guide>.

For example, on p. 29 of his report, Mr. Rothschild claims, “On that day, Jack himself wrote two tweets *supporting QAnon*” [emphasis added (SM)]:

- “I don’t know who or what Q is so there’s that. But no ones [sic] hurting each other it’s civilized encouraging people to learn independently supports trump and the constitution. So. WTF. #WWG1WGA”;
- “Honestly I ask myself about this Q thing and look for a reason not to trust anything about it. I don’t see Qsters in the street breaking into buildings claiming real estate pulling down statues or beating up people in the name of some form of justice or retribution BS.”

The first tweet above begins by clearly stating Jack Flynn has no knowledge of QAnon—in contradiction to Mr. Rothschild’s conclusion on p. 32 that Jack and Leslie Flynn “knew what the QAnon movement was.” The rest of the first tweet is stating “lack of harm no one is hurting each other its civilized”—which is not an expression of support. The last part of the tweet states that QAnon encourages people to learn independently, supports Trump and the constitution—also not expressing supportive sentiments.

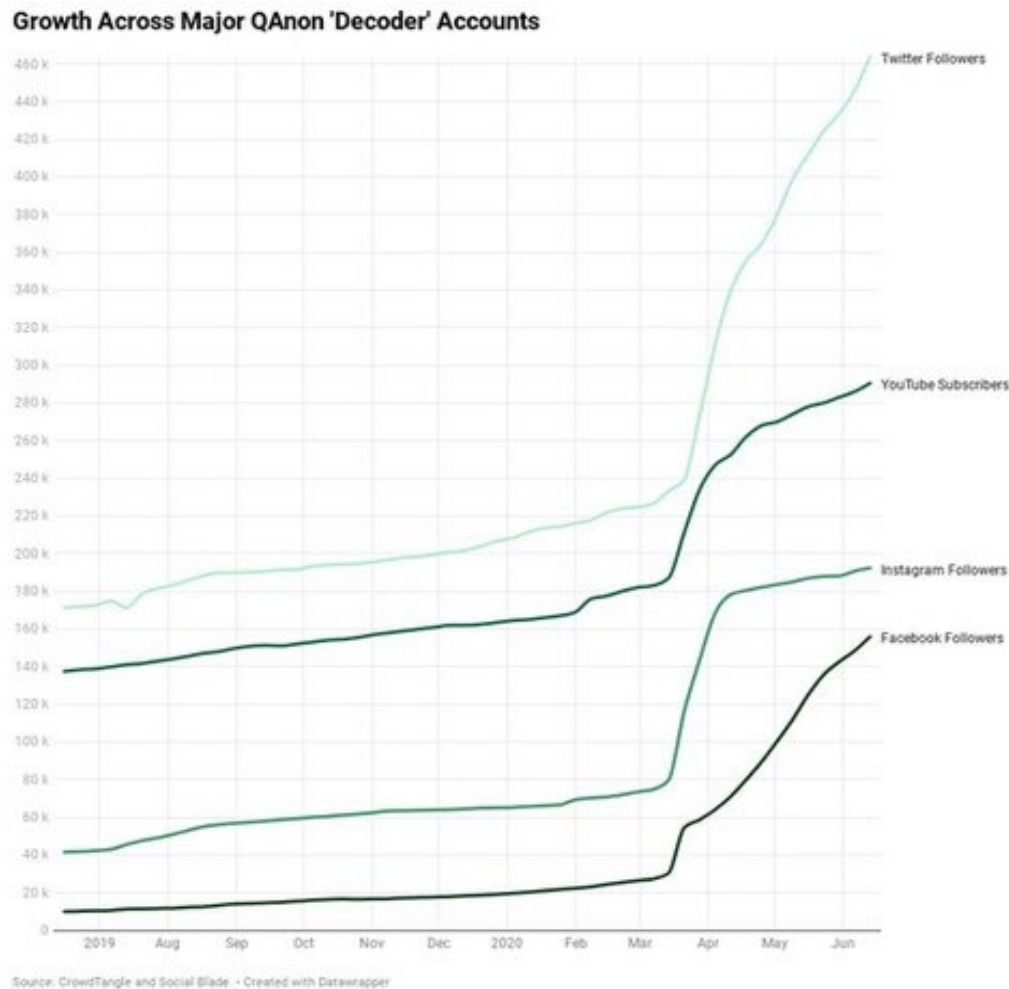
The second tweet once again negates Mr. Rothschild’s conclusion that Jack Flynn “knew what the QAnon movement was” when it begins with “Honestly I ask myself about this Q thing,” indicating lack of knowledge and doubts about what “this Q thing” is. The rest of the tweet also could not be coded as supporting QAnon, because not “breaking into buildings claiming real estate pulling down statues or beating up people in the name of some form of justice or retribution” is not support. If someone was asked their opinion of Person X and responded, “Person X is not breaking into buildings, claiming real estate, pulling down statues or beating up people in the name of some form of justice or retribution,” observers would hardly see that as a supportive statement so much as a denial of wrongdoing. It seems Jack Flynn is comparing QAnon, of which he professes confusion or lack of knowledge, with another kind of political movement he sees as destructive. An attribution of Jack Flynn’s opinion of the other movement could be made from this—but not of his opinion on QAnon.

Other tweets by Jack Flynn cited by Mr. Rothschild in his report also speak against Mr. Rothschild’s own conclusions that Jack Flynn “knew what QAnon movement was.” For example, on p. 29, Mr. Rothschild quotes Jack Flynn’s tweet, “Please send me information explaining Q’ origins [sic]. Would like to truly understand more about this. Clarity matters. Thank you.” Once again, far from expressing knowledge of QAnon, this tweet clearly shows ignorance of it. In summary, despite the opening statement in Mr. Rothschild’s report, beliefs can be measured. The social science of measuring beliefs has been around for many decades, with validated, sophisticated, and diverse methodology. Because Mr. Rothschild is apparently not even aware of this methodology, let alone proficient in it, he is unable to properly assess beliefs in Jack and Leslie Flynn’s depositions, where they are asked direct questions about their knowledge and support for QAnon, or to assess beliefs or knowledge of QAnon in their tweets. At times Mr. Rothschild’s conclusions directly contradict the Flynns’ tweets that Mr. Rothschild quotes in his own report. Mr. Rothschild’s opinion, thus, is uninformed about the social science of how beliefs can be assessed, and is based entirely on his journalistic practice.

## 7. Journalism versus social science

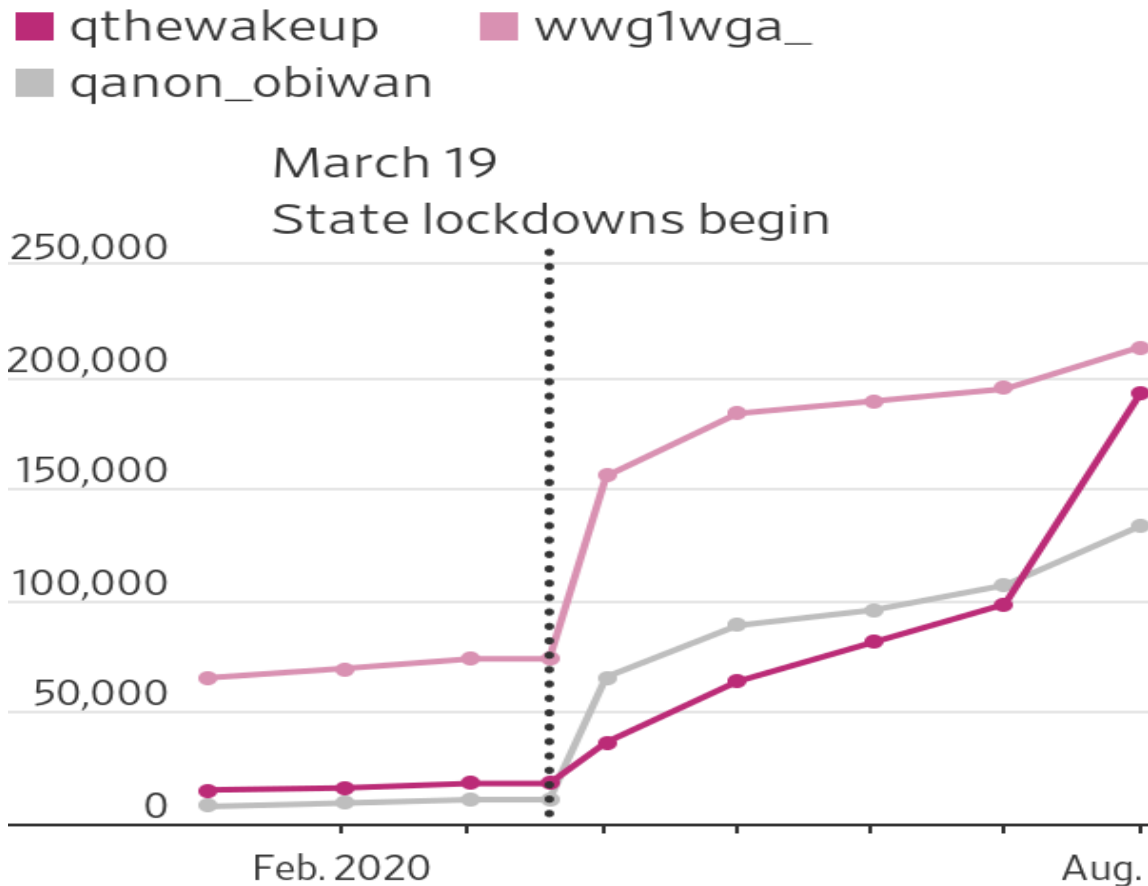
Journalists and researchers are often interested in the same phenomena, and QAnon is one such phenomenon. However, there are important differences in how journalists and scientists approach and analyze their phenomena of interest. One factor that differentiates scientific and journalistic treatments is time: journalistic investigations are typically carried out much faster (days, weeks or months) than scientific studies (months or years). The ability to print journalistic stories fast has a benefit in that it allows timely coverage of important topics and a faster accumulation of data.

QAnon is a new phenomenon. Even though the original Q-drop appeared in late 2017, QAnon did not take off as a mass political movement until the government-instituted COVID lockdowns began in 2020, when engagement with QAnon material online grew by 600%.<sup>33</sup> See below graphics representing these dramatic increases in engagement with QAnon online materials over time:



<sup>33</sup> Bloom, M., & Moskalenko, S. (2021). *Pastels and Pedophiles: Inside the mind of QAnon*. Stanford University Press.

## Followers for three top QAnon-linked, public Instagram accounts



Note: Follower count from first of each month

Source: Storyful

In other words, QAnon as a mass following is only three years old. Typically, it takes social scientists several months – at best – to secure research funding to study a phenomenon they’re interested in. In those months, journalists have the advantage of being able to collect and share information about the phenomenon.

After securing funding, it takes social scientists weeks or months to obtain clearance from an institutional ethics review board—which reviews the study’s rationale to make sure it is grounded in previous research, that the study does not deceive or mislead participants, that participant privacy is protected, and that the research methods for collecting data are sound. The ethics review board also requires that researchers provide participants in their studies with information about who is collecting data and for which institution, and contact information for researchers in case the participants have questions or complaints.



Until the ethics review board's approval is obtained, no data collection can begin. In fact, institutions do not release grant funds to pay participants for their participation until researchers can demonstrate an ethics review board approval. [see Appendix 3: An ethics review board approval for the research I conduct on QAnon at Georgia State University].

With the ethics approval secured, researchers can finally begin collecting data. Depending on methods, data collection can take days or months. Once the data are collected, they need to be statistically analyzed, written up as a research article and sent to a research journal. The process of publishing at a research journal can take years, because it includes peer review: the article is sent to two to three researchers (this process is double-blind, the authors and reviewers don't know each others' identity). Reviewers are researchers in the same field of study who focus on very similar research questions. They review the paper: the theory, the methods, the results, and the conclusions drawn from them. And almost always they find something to critique as not complying with theoretical or empirical or statistical or logical standards. At best, that means the article needs to be re-written, or the data re-analyzed, or maybe new data collected in addition to the old ones, or maybe the article is rejected altogether, and the entire process restarts "from scratch." By the time the research article comes out, journalists have published hundreds of op-eds and feature stories in the time it took social scientists to produce the article. For that reason, scientists often rely on journalistic accounts when researching new phenomena, such as QAnon: journalistic accounts offer timely and prolific data when little other data are available.

The disadvantage of journalistic practice's quick turnaround, however, is that there is little oversight of methods; unclear ethical standards (see comments above about "standard journalistic practices"); and often bias (see comments above about bias in reporting on new religious movements). For these reasons, journalistic data are not often reliable, and researchers are advised to "triangulate" journalistic accounts whenever possible with other data sources—to minimize the likelihood of "false positives," especially where it comes with "newsworthy" stories<sup>34</sup> where the high public demand can drive at times lower-quality supply of reporting.

Since 2020, when QAnon just began its immense expansion, there has been a growing amount of scholarship of QAnon, with a corresponding wealth of accumulated knowledge about how to measure QAnon beliefs. Mr. Rothschild seems unaware of this body of knowledge and thus unable to leverage it.

Mr. Rothschild's expertise stems from his journalistic work observing and interviewing QAnon media and followers. But this expertise is of dubious relevance here. There is no overseeing authority to certify Mr. Rothschild's observation and interviewing methods, and as a result the soundness of his data—on which his opinions are based. There is no funding agency to review his work, no ethics review board to make sure standards of ethics are maintained, and no peer review to ensure reporting is accurately representing the collected data. There is no safeguard of any kind to ensure that Mr. Rothschild's journalism would result in reliable data and analytics.

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<sup>34</sup> Moskalenko, S., Freilich, J. D., Chermak, S., Gruenewald, J., & McCauley, C. (2023). Growth opportunities in American and British terrorism research. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 16(1), 44-69.

Mr. Rothschild concludes his report with the following statement, “It is impossible to know with certainty whether Jack and Leslie Flynn believe QAnon is real. But their actions speak clearly. They knew what the QAnon movement was, wanted to appeal to Q believers for financial purposes, and had no trouble sharing their interest in Q with others—until the moment they did. By any reasonable definition, these are the hallmarks of QAnon followers.”

However, the evidence in the case contradicts the statement that Jack and Leslie Flynn knew what QAnon movement was. The wish to support General Flynn’s defense fund is a separate motivation unrelated to beliefs in or support for QAnon. And sharing one’s interest in QAnon with others is not a hallmark a QAnon follower—otherwise Mr. Rothschild, whose interest in QAnon he shared with others through hundreds of articles, a number of interviews, and books, would also be considered a QAnon follower.

Famously, nothing is certain except death and taxes—but as far as determining beliefs, social science can do a lot better than what Mr. Rothschild’s report offers in analyzing people’s speech and writing, and in making attributions from their behaviors.

Your very truly,

*/s/ Sophia Moskalenko, Ph.D*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Moskalenko', with a stylized, flowing script.

Dr. Sophia Moskalenko  
[smoskale@gmail.com](mailto:smoskale@gmail.com)

# **APPENDIX “1”**

## Pastels and Pedophiles: Inside the Mind of Q...

Book by Mia Bloom and Sophia Moskalenko



Stanford University Press

<https://www.sup.org/books/title>

### Pastels and Pedophiles: Inside the Mind of QAnon

A NEW YORK TIMES EDITORS' PICK / TOP 10 RECOMMENDED READ Two experts of extremist radicalization take us down the QAnon rabbit hole, exposing how the ...  
\$20.00



Amazon.com

<https://www.amazon.com/Pastels-Pedophiles-Inside-...>

### Pastels and Pedophiles: Inside the Mind of QAnon

The QAnon conspiracy theory has ensnared many women, who identify as members of "pastel QAnon," answering the call to "save the children." With *Pastels and* ...  
\$20.00 · 30-day returns



Amazon.com

<https://www.amazon.com/Pastels-Pedophiles-Inside-...>

### Pastels and Pedophiles: Inside the Mind of QAnon

*Pastels and Pedophiles: Inside the Mind of QAnon* - Kindle edition by Bloom, Mia, Moskalenko, Sophia. Download it once and read it on your Kindle device, PC, ...  
\$15.49 · 30-day returns



The New York Times

### Book preview

25/226 pages available

[Preview](#)



### About

Did you like this book?



A NEW YORK TIMES EDITORS' PICK / TOP 10 RECOMMENDED READ Two experts of extremist radicalization take us down the QAnon rabbit hole, exposing how the conspiracy theory ensnared countless Americans, and show us a way back to sanity. ... [Google Books](#)

Originally published: June 15, 2021

Authors: Sophia Moskalenko, Mia Bloom

[Feedback](#)

## The Storm Is Upon Us: How QAnon Became a...

Book by Mike Rothschild



Amazon.com

<https://www.amazon.com/Storm-Upon-Us-Conspirac...>

### The Storm Is Upon Us: How QAnon Became a Movement ...

Amazon.com: The Storm Is Upon Us: How QAnon Became a Movement, Cult, and Conspiracy Theory of Everything eBook : Rothschild, Mike: Kindle Store.  
\$12.99 · 30-day returns



Penguin Random House

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/the-...>

### The Storm Is Upon Us by Mike Rothschild: 9781685890186

"I hope everyone reads this book. It has become such a crucial thing for all of us to understand." —Erin Burnett, CNN "An ideal tour guide for..."  
Free delivery over \$20



The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/aug/the-stor...>

### The Storm is Upon Us review: indispensable QAnon history ...

Aug 21, 2022 — Donald Trump welcomed the conspiracy at the White House. Its followers stormed Congress. Big Tech still seems not to care.



Publishers Weekly

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/>

### Book preview

67/319 pages available

[Preview](#)



### About

Did you like this book?



"I hope everyone reads this book. It has become such a crucial thing for all of us to understand." —Erin Burnett, CNN  
"An ideal tour guide for your journey into the depths of the rabbit hole that is QAnon. It even shows you a glimmer of light at the exit." ... [Google Books](#)

Originally published: June 22, 2021

Author: Mike Rothschild

[Genre: Biography](#)

# **APPENDIX “2”**





Mike Rothschild (no relation)

I've been off twitter but I heard your book is coming out early! Congrats. Very exciting. Mazel Tov for finishing it. I wish you great success

4:03 AM

thanks! and you too with your book!

7:22 PM

It was such a whirlwind .. do you know when will sommer's book is coming out ? And wow 500,000 copies ... that is amazing ! Congrats

8:30 PM

I don't know when Will's book is out, he hasn't announced anything. yeah, the print run is just mindblowing.

8:38 PM

Honestly if you were Michelle obama I'd get it

Most presses are only print on demand so that's amazing ..

Maybe our books will be reviewed together 🙏

8:41 PM

that would be cool - we've gotten a bunch of requests for advanced copies so far

11:22 PM

Wow that's amazing. I hope it's a massive success 🙏👍

11:29 PM

May 8, 2021

Did you see the Kirkus review? [kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/m...](https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/m...)



I like the last line that people should read the two books together (a rising tide lifts all boats)

5:17 PM





# **APPENDIX “3”**





August 03, 2022

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Mail: P.O. Box 3999  
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999  
Phone: 404/413-3500

In Person: 3rd Floor  
58 Edgewood  
FWA: 00000129

Principal Investigator: David Maimon

Key Personnel: Bloom, Mia M; Maimon, David; Moskalenko, Sophia

Study Department: RF-Criminal Justice, Georgia State University

Study Title: "Weaponized Conspiracies: Mapping the Social Ecology of Misinformation, Radicalization and Violence"

Funding Agency: Office of Naval Research

Review Type: Exempt Amendment

IRB Number: H21396

Reference Number: 370959

Approval Date: 06/23/2021

Status Check Due By: 06/22/2024

Amendment Effective Date: 08/01/2022

The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board reviewed and **approved** the amendment to your above referenced Study.

This amendment is approved for the following modification(s):

- We would like to add additional surveys to the study
- additional surveys will not impact previous participants. Prolific will recruit new participants for the study

The amendment does not alter the approval period which is listed above and a status update must be submitted at least 30 days before the due date if research is to continue beyond that time frame. Any unanticipated problems resulting from participation in this study must be reported to the IRB through the Unanticipated Problem form.

For more information, visit our website at [www.gsu.edu/irb](http://www.gsu.edu/irb).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kiki Sindad', is centered below the word 'Sincerely,'.

Kiki Sindad, IRB Member